

Airbus Lands in Mobile – South Alabama Cheers:

Last week's announcement that Airbus will be locating a major manufacturing plant in Mobile was correctly described as the worst kept secret in our region. In fact, rumors of the pending announcement prompted so much press coverage the week before that an equally big story – Congress's final passage of the RESTORE Act – was nearly drowned out.

The combination of Airbus and RESTORE was enough to lift the Gulf Coast into the clouds. For a region that suffered an unprecedented environmental disaster after winning a major military aircraft contract only to see it taken away from us, we were overdue a celebration or two.

Airbus landing in Mobile was a regional victory without question. The official press conference at the Mobile Convention Center was attended by local leaders from throughout Southwest Alabama. We can all cheer for the 1,000 direct jobs and the 2,500 construction jobs that will come to Mobile because following them will be even more job openings throughout our area as Airbus suppliers seek business-friendly communities to set up shop.

I was honored to address the audience at last week's Airbus announcement, and I'd like to share a portion of my remarks with you.

"Two thousand, seven hundred and twenty eight days. And who thought anyone was counting? Actually, everyone here today has been counting—every day—I know I certainly have. That's how long the courtship between EADS/Airbus has been with our community.

"It was January, 2005, when EADS issued a 'Request for Information' for a manufacturing site in the United States. They were very careful—as we know they are—and looked at 70 sites in 32 states.

"Finally, in June, 2005 they selected our home, Mobile to become their home in the United States.

"We all know the purpose of the initial selection process was to find a site to build a new tanker for the Air Force. But EADS went an extra step and said they would build an Airbus Engineering Center right away. They wanted to plant their flag deeply into American soil. And, as we know, they did exactly what they said they would do.

"This tangible gesture of commitment told us, early on, that we had entered into a relationship with a 'keeper.' Someone worthy of pursuit, truly the best of the best.

Then out of nowhere in August of 2005, a horrific tragedy struck the Gulf Coast in the form of Hurricane Katrina. Within days of that deadly storm, a large, strange-looking cargo aircraft—the Airbus Beluga—landed in Mobile carrying 23 tons of relief supplies from the French and English people, and a portable hospital from the Germans—all destined for our neighbors in Mississippi and Louisiana.

"When the region was in its greatest need, Airbus was among the first to respond. From this point on we were sure. This was a company with which we could build a lasting relationship.

"It is here, it is now that we tie the knot and bind our futures together. Just as Mercedes transformed Alabama and our role in automotive manufacturing 15 years ago, Airbus will now help transform the entire Gulf Coast into a new corridor of aviation excellence.

"We all know that commitments built over time—on friendship and trust—are the strongest and most lasting. Mobile is ready, South Alabama is ready, the Gulf Coast is ready to step upon the world stage yet once again and lead.

"Today, Airbus confidently soars into a bright future filled with blue skies and unlimited potential; we are so excited to be on the front row for this exciting journey."

RESTORE Act Becomes Law:

During a White House ceremony last Friday evening, President Obama signed the Surface Transportation Act. Included as a part of the new highway legislation was especially good news for the Gulf Coast.

The RESTORE Act is now the law of the land, directing the lion's share of future Clean Water Act fine money from the BP spill to the Gulf Coast states for local economic and environmental restoration.

The approval of RESTORE has the potential to positively impact our coastal communities in ways not seen in a lifetime. While the total amount of funds to be collected from BP and other responsible parties is yet to be determined, the general view is the final settlement could be in the billions of dollars. Eighty percent of what BP and others pay under the Clean Water Act will be funneled to the five Gulf Coast states, including Alabama.

It has taken a year of hard work to pass the RESTORE Act. Given the amount of gridlock on Capitol Hill these days, RESTORE's enactment is a tremendous accomplishment and another reason to celebrate.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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